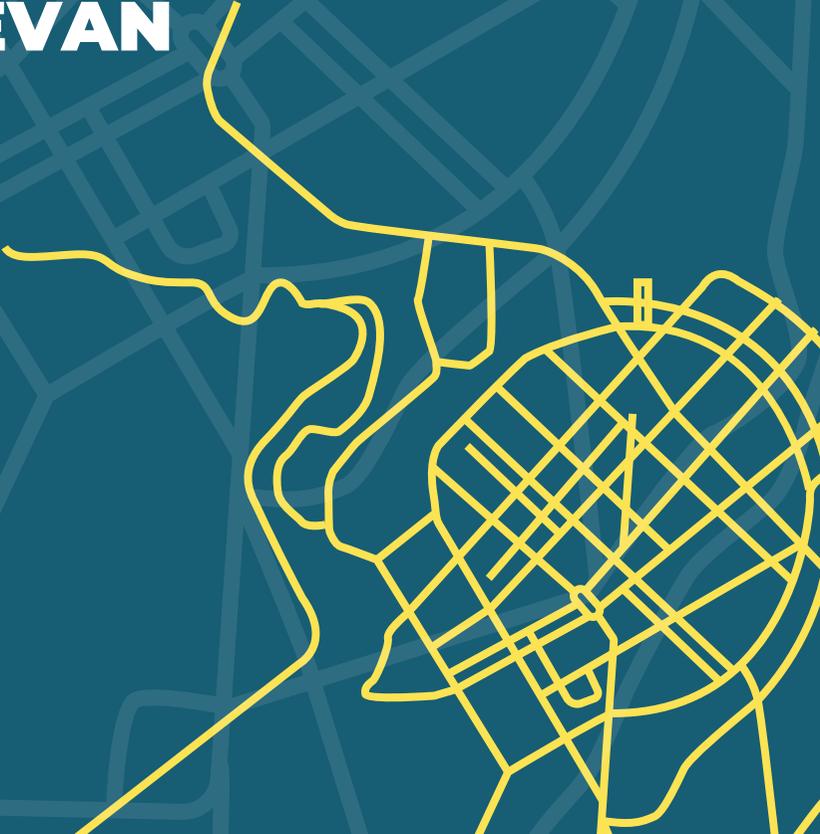


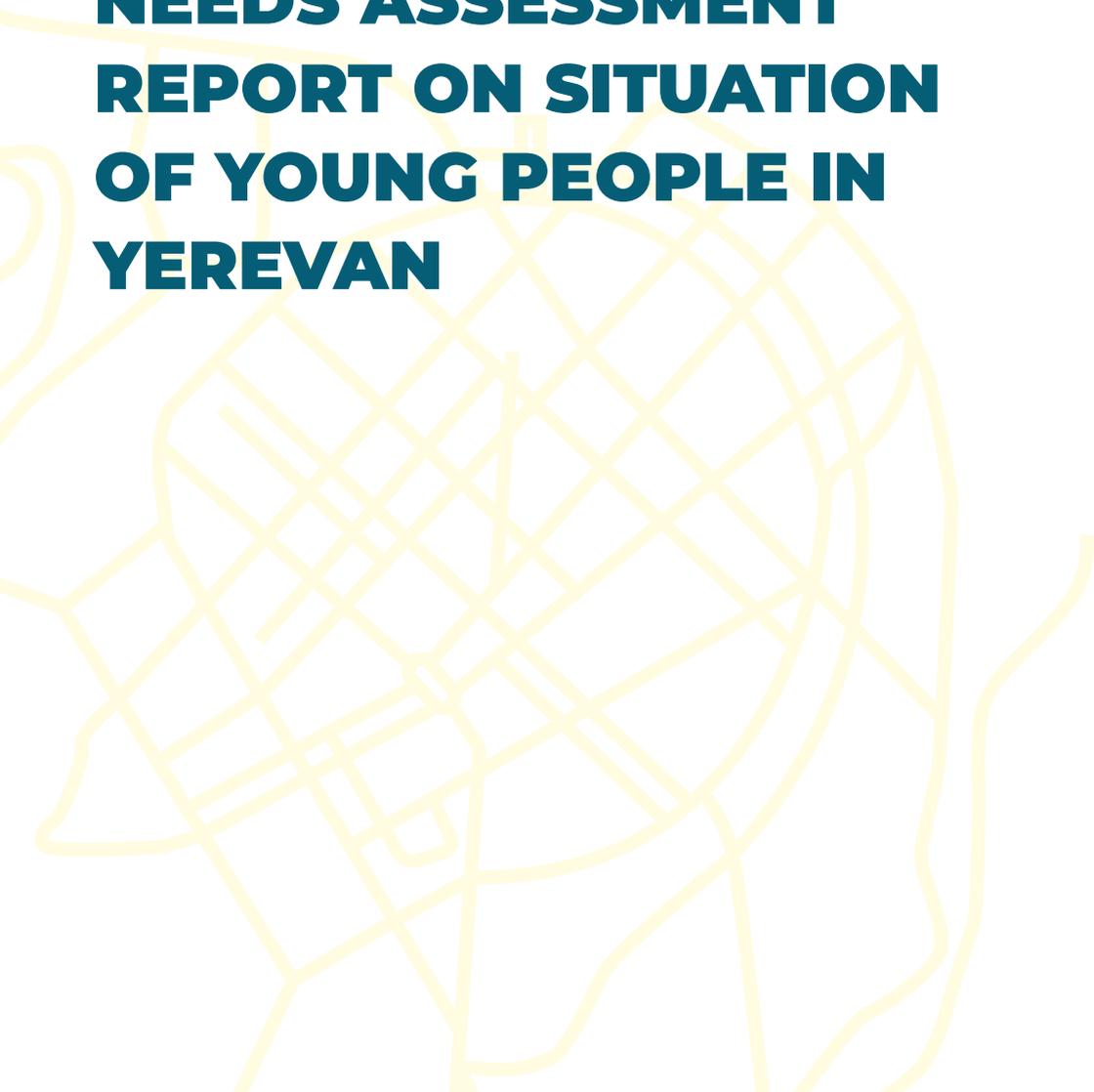


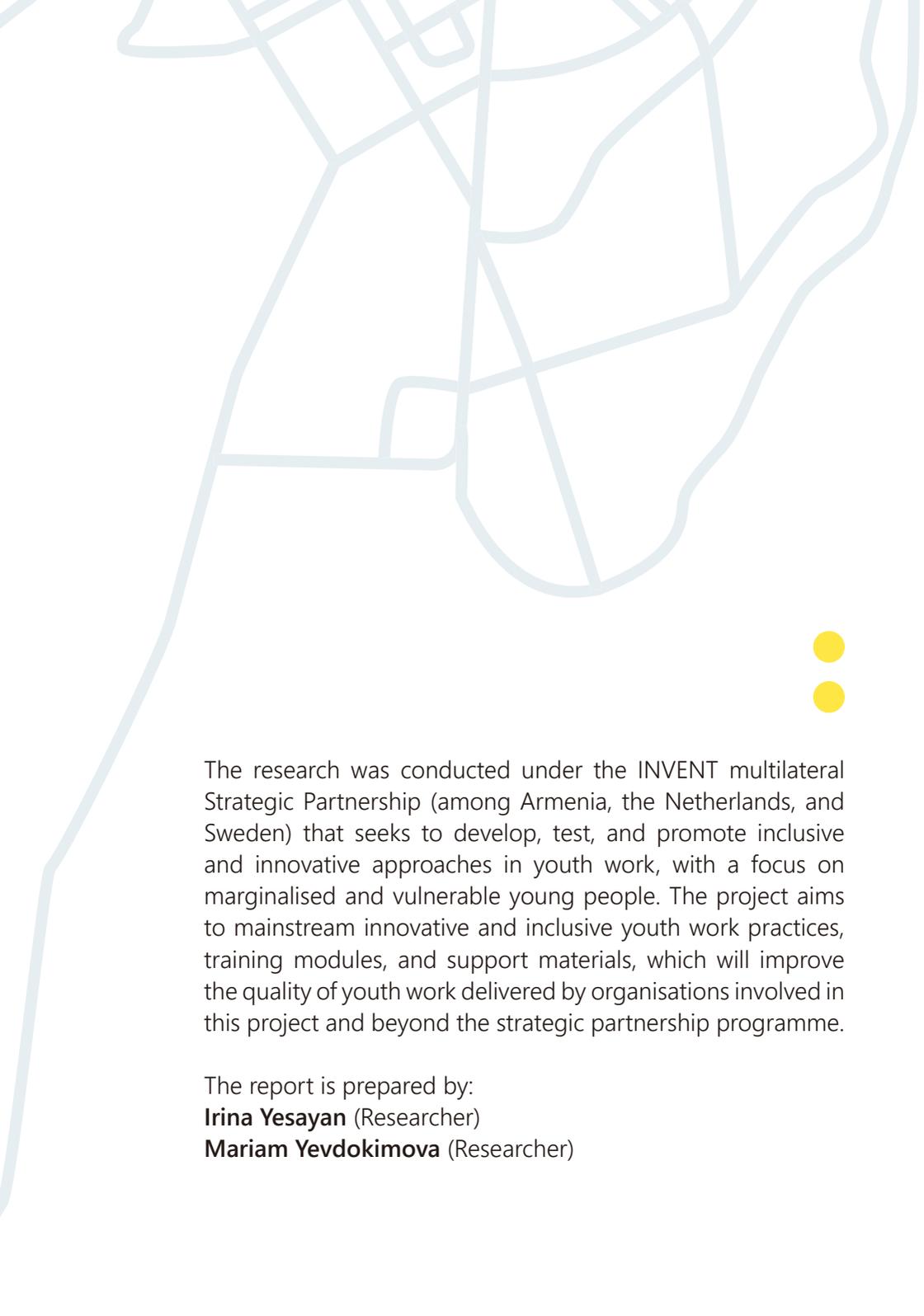
**NEEDS ASSESSMENT
REPORT ON SITUATION
OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN
YEREVAN**





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The research was conducted under the INVENT multilateral Strategic Partnership (among Armenia, the Netherlands, and Sweden) that seeks to develop, test, and promote inclusive and innovative approaches in youth work, with a focus on marginalised and vulnerable young people. The project aims to mainstream innovative and inclusive youth work practices, training modules, and support materials, which will improve the quality of youth work delivered by organisations involved in this project and beyond the strategic partnership programme.

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● EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The needs assessment was conducted under the INVENT multilateral Strategic Partnership (among Armenia, the Netherlands, and Sweden) that seeks to develop, test, and promote inclusive and innovative approaches in youth work. The research specifically focused on youth living in Yerevan (capital of RA), particularly revealing their needs, challenges and aspirations, supporting social networks, ways of civic engagement and access to participation in decision making, available youth activities and programmes, stakeholders and legislation on youth.

During April - May 2022, five focus group discussions were conducted with young people living in Yerevan aged 16-30, and 10 key informant interviews with policy makers, representatives of local/national/international youth organisations and experts. The assessment team also conducted an online survey, the final sample included 291 Facebook users aged 16-30 living in Yerevan.

Youth policy and civic engagement: Armenian youth have been increasingly active in civic and political life in recent years, particularly after the Velvet Revolution in 2018. Even though the concept of youth participation in government decision-making has become recognised as important, the practical implementation of this principle has still not been achieved. Moreover, the main obstacle in terms of youth policy making and implementation is the absence of law on youth or youth strategy in Armenia, which has resulted in fractured youth work. At the same time young people believe they can have a positive influence in their community and their engagement in decision-making is crucial. However, almost half of the respondents (43%) are not aware of any platforms through which they can have an influence as a young person. Both online survey and qualitative study revealed that social media and NGOs are perceived as the main platforms where they can have influence as youngsters. Interestingly, during focus group discussions, NGOs were considered as a platform only among those participants who either volunteered at NGOs or participated in a youth project. Even though young people are not aware about platforms, more than half of online survey respondents (62%) mentioned

they have ideas on how to influence the development and improvement of their community. The reason for a lack of participation among young people is rooted in a lack of trust towards decision-makers and low level of responsiveness of state bodies; limited capacity among decision makers on how to bring the young people into the process; and capacity gaps of youngsters about the forms of participation in the decision-making process. Youth participation can also be improved through a number of approaches: education and capacity development for both young people and decision-makers; joint project implementation to increase trust towards decision-makers; engagement of diverse groups of youngsters in NGOs or establishment of youth centres, etc.

Needs, challenges and aspirations: Youths' priorities were remarkably similar across focus groups and online survey participants. Professional development, finding a job and studying abroad are the main short-term goals of young people living in Yerevan. These goals are quite obvious as numerous studies confirm that unemployment is one of the primary problems among young people, so their primary goals are related to solving this problem. There is a major gap between the education received and the demands of the labour market. Current curricula of professional education and delivery of education are described by young people as too theoretical, with the inability to gain practical knowledge and skills necessary for the real jobs out of universities. Another reason for low level of employment is lack of professional orientation and career counselling programmes. As revealed during key informant interviews, there is a decrease of motivation in participating in non-formal education opportunities among young people living in Yerevan. Some reasons include the increasing number of opportunities and difficulty among youngsters to filter suitable ones; quite a general nature of the programmes without clear explanation of benefits to young people; and, in general, lack of grass-root youth work in Yerevan. The issue of volunteering work recognition was mentioned as well, both by key informants and youngsters.

The great deal of influence that parents have over different aspects of young people's life is also considered a challenge according to focus group participants. In particular, influence is higher on programmes of study that youth pursue, participation in educational opportunities abroad, living

separately from parents, which lead to self-actualisation issues and low level of life skills development.

Even though transportation problems in Yerevan are related to all groups of society, however, as mentioned by young people, the issue quite often restrains them from participating in the entertainment events and educational opportunities. The same issue applies for young people who live in neighbourhood areas.

Financial literacy, knowledge on labour rights, soft skills among young people aged 16 - 20, skills in interpersonal communication and emotional intelligence, applied time management skills, digital security skills, skills on how to act in emergency situations generally, and in Yerevan, are the general skills most demanded among Yerevan youth.

Leisure time and social networks: Generally, in Yerevan, according to young people, wide opportunities exist to spend their free time. However, sufficient salary is needed to attend various events. Mostly, the various free opportunities provided by the state are only for youngsters under 18. Even though diverse opportunities exist, according to key informants, organisation of meaningful leisure time for young people is still a current issue. Interestingly, youth who grew up in regions are most likely to mention that in Yerevan there are a lot of opportunities to organise their free time, compared to young people who grew up in Yerevan.

Youngsters living in Yerevan prefer to spend their free time hanging out with friends, followed by reading/watching interesting materials via the Internet, listening to music and watching films. Healthy lifestyle and participating in sports are not a widespread way of spending time. The organisation of festivals, concerts, conferences, amateur competitions, seminars and other public events, development of open-air sport infrastructure, establishment of youth centres and co-working spaces for young people can improve leisure time organisation in terms of making it more diverse, targeted and meaningful.

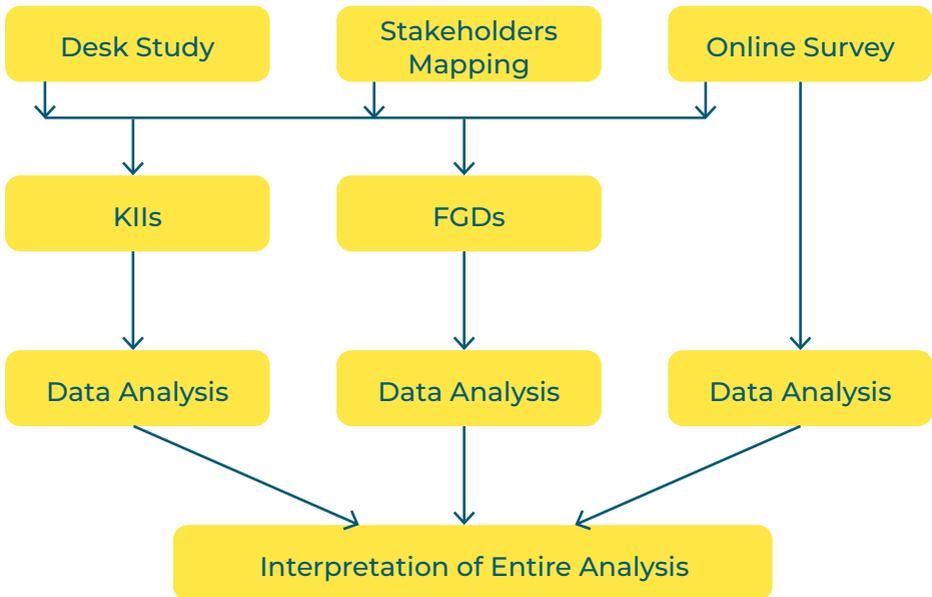
● ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPFE	Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EaP	Eastern Partnership
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies
KII	Key Informant Interview
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RA	Republic of Armenia

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

For the purposes of the needs assessment study on the situation of young people in Yerevan, mixed research methodology was applied, particularly the concurrent nested model with qualitative method¹ guiding the study. The target group of the study was young people aged 16 - 30, living in Yerevan. The framework of research design is presented in the following table:

Table 1: Research Design



1. W.Creswell J., (2013) Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, Second Edition, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, California, pg. 12

Desk Research: During the desk research analysis of policy documentation, as well as existing international and local research, publications on youth in Armenia with a focus on Yerevan was carried out. The desk research focused on the following aspects:

- *media*: media freedom
- *political conditions*: political stability, governance system, the capacity of the state for service delivery, and legitimacy of the state
- *participation*: youth political participation on a national and local level and youth participation in the civil society
- *economic and national conditions*: youth working conditions, inequality among youth individuals/groups, poverty, and social mobility
- *social-cultural conditions*: general living conditions, education, religions, ethnic groups, minorities, and gender aspects
- *security conditions*: security situation related to youth, police, and crime.

Stakeholder Mapping: The goal of the stakeholder mapping was to identify diverse stakeholders and actors (e.g. state agencies, local CSOs, international organisations, etc.) in the youth field, and investigate the interest, roles, and activities of stakeholder groups. The mapping covers the following questions:

- *who they are*: tasks, target groups, role in the local community and resource capacity
- *agenda*: the actors mandate, mission, and values
- *where they act*: in what areas are they active and a source of legitimisation
- *cooperation*: who are they cooperating with and what are their relationships
- *problem analysis*: identification of challenges, needs and windows of opportunities.

Primary data were gathered throughout:

- (i) key informant interviews
- (ii) focus group discussions
- (iii) an online survey

Key-informant interviews (KI): KI interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in youth policy development and implementation, as well as engaged in project implementation and research related to youth work in order to obtain deeper insights regarding the current state of youth, youth strategy, and issues and potential challenges young people are facing. For the identification of key informants, a purposive sampling strategy for qualitative interviews was applied. For the expert selection, the following criteria was used: type of institutions, sphere of activity, professional experience of the experts, etc. Total of 10 KI interviews were conducted. The following table shows the distribution of institutions from which key informants was selected:

Table 2: Distribution of informants by institution

Category	N of key informants
Government	2
Local Self-Governing Body	1
Local CSOs	4
Local Youth Experts	3
Total	10

Focus Group Discussions (FGD): Five focus group discussions were conducted with young people (16 - 30 y.o.) living in Yerevan. The research team, based on the online survey and KI interviews, developed a focus group participant selection matrix accounting for socio-demographic data to ensure that youth from all sub-groups of interest are included, such as gender, age, people with fewer opportunities, location, etc. For each FGD, 6 - 8 participants were randomly selected based on predefined criteria. The following table shows the selection matrix:

Table 3: FGD participants selection matrix

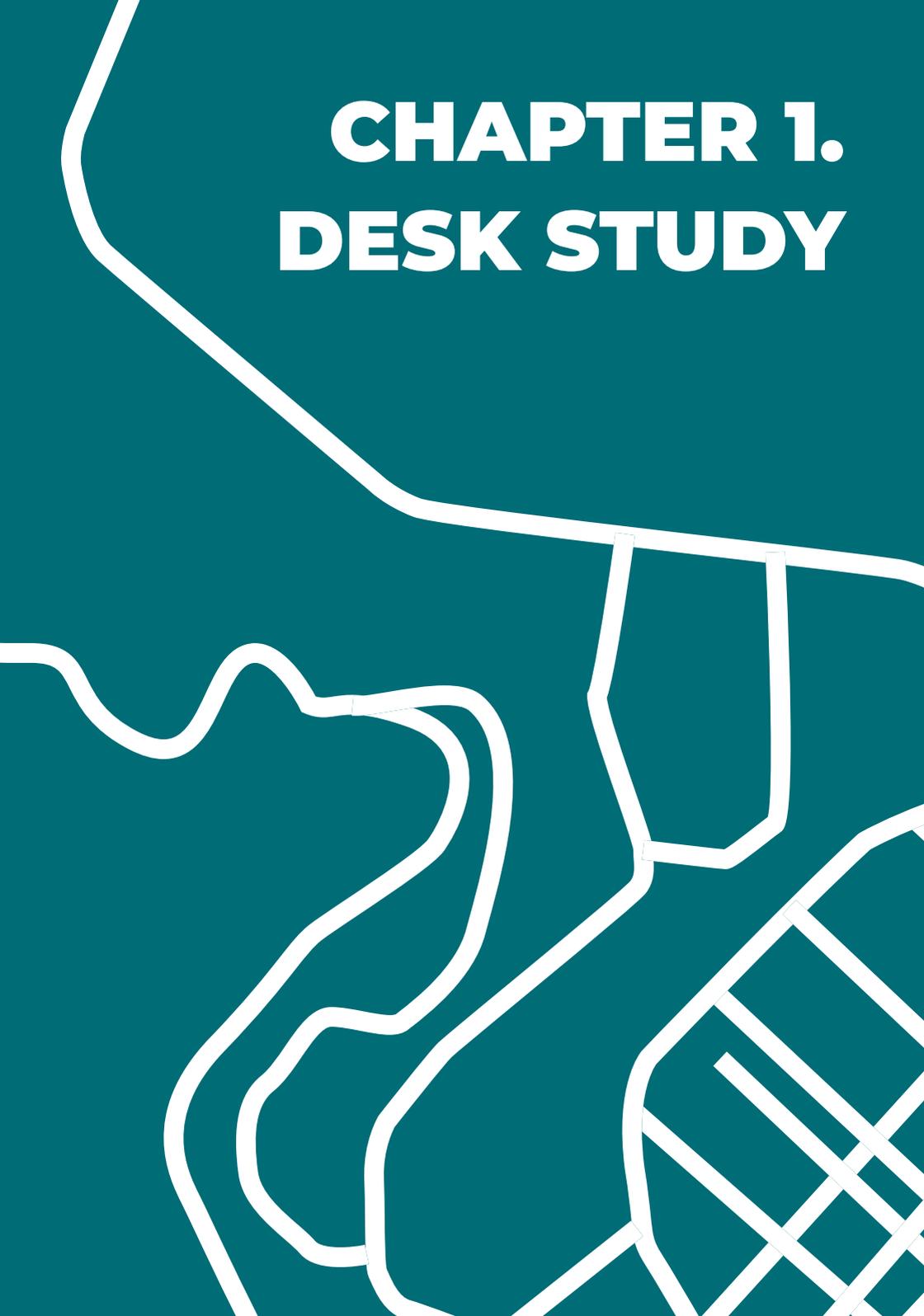
N	Education	Gender	Age	Community	Programme Participation
1	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Yes
2	Mixed	Mixed	16 - 25	Avan, Nor Nork, Nubarashen, Erebuni, Shengavit, Malatia-Sebastia	No international projects
3	Mixed	Mixed	16 - 25	Arabkir, Kentron, Kanaker-Zeytun, Ajapnyak, Davtashen, Nork-Marash	No international projects
4	Mixed	Male	16 - 25	Mixed	Mixed
5	Mixed	Mixed	26 - 30	Mixed	Mixed

Online Survey: Online survey was conducted to assess the needs and problems of young people and the challenges they face. The survey was conducted among 291 Facebook users aged from 16 - 30 living in Yerevan through an online platform (SurveyPlanet). The questionnaire was developed based on [Fryshuset's](#) Need Evaluation questionnaire taking into consideration the local situation of young people, discussed and agreed upon with partners of Armenian Progressive Youth NGO. The questionnaire was pre-tested (through 10 pilot interviews) and adjusted based on the pre-test results.

During primary data collection, diverse groups of young people were reached, in particular, the vast majority of the youngsters who filled the online survey (80%) who had previously participated in any local/ international youth development project. At the same time, during three out of five focus group discussions, participation of young people with fewer opportunities in terms of participation in youth projects was ensured.

CHAPTER 1.

DESK STUDY

The background is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this are several thick white lines that form an abstract, organic pattern. These lines meander across the page, creating various shapes and paths. In the lower right quadrant, the lines intersect to form a grid-like structure, resembling a stylized desk or a network diagram. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and minimalist.



I. Political conditions: political stability, governance system, capacity of state for service delivery and legitimacy of state

Armenia is a Parliamentary Republic, which gained its independence following a referendum on September 21st, 1991. The Prime Minister is the head of the government, nominated by a parliamentary majority, while the President is the head of state and is elected by parliament for a seven-year term. According to the Global Freedom Score of Freedom House, Armenia is a partly free country with free internet and free independent and investigative media outlets².

Between 1995 and 2018, the elections in the country were mostly dominated by the Republican Party of Armenia and its satellite parties – a clan of corrupt officials, oligarchs and incumbent political elites that has been benefiting from the abuse of administrative resources and widespread corruption. During the autocratic rule of the Republican Party, severe limitations were imposed on opposition candidates, thus opposition groups had little chance of winning power in the flawed elections³.

In 2015, through a falsified referendum, the regime of the Republican Party introduced new changes to the constitution, which would have allowed the party's leader to stay in power after his last presidential term, now as a Prime Minister - in a new and extremely powerful role. However, in 2018, Armenia was able to establish democratic governance after peaceful demonstrations and transition. The peaceful civic revolt, which was later baptized as the 'Velvet Revolution', was a non-violent transition of power, which transformed Armenia from a corrupt autocracy to "the Economist's"

2. Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021 - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/armenia/freedom-world/2021>

3. Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2017 - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/armenia/nations-transit/2017>

country of the year⁴.

Armenia's youth-led Velvet Revolution ended a decade-long rule of the Republican Party and their leader, Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan – the country's most powerful political figure of the time. During his rule, the Republican Party deeply institutionalized corruption, militarized the country, increased the level of poverty and brain drain and supported economic monopolies and oligarchy by massively falsifying local and national elections.

Born and raised in independent Armenia and being the first generation to grow up in the era of Internet and ICT - the young Armenians were unafraid to stand up against corrupt gerontocracy. In December 2018, after the revolution, parliamentary elections were held, which were "markedly freer and fairer than elections in previous years"⁵. New parliamentary elections have brought dozens of young people to parliament, many of them civil society activists.

Armenian non-governmental organisations operate in a generally favourable legislative climate and Armenia's civil society is vibrant. Since 2018, political parties have operated in a much freer environment, though they were largely unable to hold rallies in 2020 due to COVID-19-related restrictions and later the declaration of martial law during the conflict with Azerbaijan. On 27th of September 2020, heavy fighting broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Due to the most dreadful escalation of the conflict since 1994, thousands of displaced people have arrived in Armenia. In the aftermath of the peace agreement signed between Armenia and Azerbaijan on November 10th, 2020, several settlements, regions and towns populated by Armenians have been ceded to Azerbaijan⁶, thus Armenia has seen continuous surges of large numbers of displaced people from the conflict zone.

4. The Economist's country of the year 2018 - <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/12/22/the-economists-country-of-the-year-2018>

5. Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2020 - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/armenia/freedom-world/2020>

6. BBC, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia sign Nagorno-Karabakh peace deal - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54882564>

Armenia's politics has been seriously destabilized since the fighting broke out. More than 2,400 Armenian soldiers were killed in 2020 – mostly young people – while 90,000 of the territory's residents fled to Armenia. The government faced widespread criticism over the handling of the conflict and the pandemic. Snap parliamentary elections took place in June 2021, but the ruling party was re-elected, which raised the level of dissatisfaction among some groups of society and led to the Armenia's parliamentary opposition holding rallies.



II. Participation: youth political participation on a national and local level and youth participation in civil society

Even though the concept of youth participation in government decision-making has become recognised as one of the basic and important features of Armenian State Youth Policy⁷, the practical implementation of this principle is still not there. This is especially true when we go down to the municipal level of government. Sometimes the reason for a lack of participation among young people is rooted in the mentality of the established decision-makers. They may feel that young people, many of whom have not even reached the "legal age" or voting age, cannot possibly contribute to the processes of making responsible decisions. Politicians and government officials may be convinced that they alone have the mandate to take political decisions and develop and implement policy, and that it would be wrong to let "special interest groups" influence these decisions.

However, the reason for not making the decision-making process inclusive and open for the youth, often, can also do with the simple fact that the politicians and officials do not actually know how to bring the young

7. Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia. Concept of the youth state policy of the Republic of Armenia

people into the process. They might have no prior experience in involving youth, and there might be lack of examples of good practice for how it can be done. These factors make the existing youth policy of Armenia not sustainable in the long-run. Without meaningful youth participation, the youth policy will never reflect the real needs of its target.

Youth participation can be strengthened by including young people in the design, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of instruments, strategies and programmes of the State Youth Policy. In this way, a clear message is sent to young people that their involvement is wanted, needed and is a part of the solution. By being a part of the creation and monitoring of strategies and programmes of the policy, young people will be more invested in the policy, which so far has failed to include them. Youth participation can also be improved through a number of approaches, such as education and capacity development. Youth-friendly information and materials can be developed by young people themselves, through means of traditional and inclusive technologies. The material must be accessible to young people with disabilities⁸.

Traditionally in Armenia, young people are perceived as being incapable of making decisions on their own. This has led to the under-representation of youth in decision-making processes, which today can be viewed as a real threat to the future of participatory democracy. Moreover, human rights and political rights are guaranteed to all citizens, not just some. Young people face real obstacles to fully exercising their rights. In comparison to women and ethnic minorities, young people perceive their own generation as the group which is the most politically disadvantaged.

In modern society, age-based discrimination (ageism) has yet to become a political issue to the degree gender discrimination has, but it makes sense to assume that inequalities based on age will gain more importance following the more frequent articulation of demands for changing the current situation. In addition, it is vital for the voice of young people from different sections of society to be heard. This means, for example, that girls

8. Armenian Progressive Youth, *Everybody Counts! A Handbook on Inclusion and Participation of Young People in Eastern Partnership Countries*, p.17

as well as boys must be included, and there must be involvement of young people from villages and rural areas, and not just the cities, it must involve poor as well as rich, with or without disabilities, ethnic Armenians and the representatives of national and religious minorities and youth from other groups on the equal basis. In this way, participation is increased, and any policies created following this are much stronger as a result.

In Armenia, there are still problems to resolve and needs to be met in order to ensure the participatory processes of young people. The lack of community participation in decision-making, human rights awareness and knowledge is evident among young people. Information technologies are always used to fill this gap, but there is a need for more effective specialised measures, different dimensions, in particular clubs and forums, meetings, study visits, etc., which will ensure the maximum realisation of youth's political and civil rights in various spheres of public life based on the logic that young people are the driving force of the country's public life.

The continuous expansion of the participation of young people on various platforms provides an opportunity to develop the most effective skills of young people: to communicate and assimilate information. In general, the development of civic consciousness among young people is necessary, as such, consciousness is the basis for the expression of active citizenship, ranging from relevant knowledge, abilities, skills and motivation to develop positive attitude to the use of transformed human capital in public life.

Volunteering and active NGO membership are one of the most widespread ways of participation amongst young people. Voluntary activities and the relations concerning volunteer work have only episodic regulations in Armenia. In fact, there is no common legal basis for the establishment and implementation of a culture of volunteerism. However, de Jure volunteering is developing in Armenia. The level of volunteering is the highest in Armenia compared to its neighbouring countries⁹. This can be explained by several volunteering programmes developed to bring Armenians from the Diaspora to Armenia as well as the policies of many NGO's to

9. Anna Poghosyan, Culture of Volunteerism in Armenia. Is volunteering a noble act or waste of time?, Imagine Center's platform for alternative voices from Armenia and Azerbaijan

promote volunteerism and reward their volunteers. Often volunteers in Armenia are enthusiastic young leaders who serve as role models for their peers and break the rooted stereotype that volunteerism is a forced exploitation of human resources¹⁰. This phenomenon largely contributes to the development of Civil Society in Armenia. During the War in 2020, there were many examples of volunteerism, from volunteer fighters defending the country to young people involved in organisational and humanitarian work for displaced populations.

For many years, the generation change has been one of the main issues of the Armenian political arena. Young people were engaged in various political and civic protest movements before the revolution in 2018. However, this participation was rather non-partisan and claimed to be “apolitical”. Most of the young people preferred to be part of non-conventional movements, civic actions, environmental protests without any clear political agenda. Politics and parties have been viewed negatively and few young people joined political parties.

In 2018, the political transition in Armenia created new opportunities for young people to get involved in politics and strengthen democratic institutions. Post-revolution government of Armenia has been the youngest in its history, with the Prime Minister aged 43, Deputy Prime Minister 29, Minister of Territorial Administration and Development 32, etc.¹¹. Several voices in the general public have reacted negatively to this change. However, this was a sign to young people that they can make it to the highest positions in the country and take charge for their future.

The protests of 2018 were mostly led by young people and students and “brought an unprecedented number of young people into the executive and legislative branches of power”¹². However, this has not yet led to

10. Yevgenya Paturyan and Valentina Gevorgyan, Trust towards NGOs and volunteering in South Caucasus: civil society moving away from post-communism? in: Southern European and Black Sea Studies, vol. 14, No 2, Routledge, 2014, pp. 239 - 262.

11. Youth in Power: The Fourth Wave or Armenia’s Political Elite: <https://evnreport.com/politics/youth-in-power-the-fourth-wave-of-armenia-s-political-elite>

12. Peaceful Change initiative, Youth Participation in Decision-Making and Peacebuilding in Armenia, 2019

decisive developments in youth policy and promotion of youth participation remains low on the list of the priorities of the new government.

When it comes to student representatives and student bodies, for many years they did not serve as genuine and independent institutions representing young people. The politicisation of academic institutions and student activities from the early 2000s to 2018 left very small margin for student autonomy and student activism. Along with the decreasing quality standards of the higher education system in Armenia, there has been no open and free policy debate about higher education because of the excessive political control of the public policy discourse, self-censorship of the academia and lack of student discussion platforms. Student unions have been serving as an easy access point to successfully make it to Armenian politics but there have been no alternative spaces and platforms for independent student activism. Due to politicisation of student unions, the “platforms uniting the youth and making their voice audible for decision-makers do not exist or are not sufficiently effective”¹³.

The political transition of 2018 opened a new “window of opportunities” for student participation in Armenia. However, this grassroots mobilization is yet to demonstrate its long-term sustainability, particularly with respect to achieving positive reforms in the areas of higher education, democratic governance and youth participation. Even though students in Armenia have proven to be a valuable and untapped resource, they remain excluded from participating in any debates on educational reforms and decision-making processes. Students are critical actors, who can bring a positive change. However, they are the least consulted and the most excluded from any public discourse.

13. EU-Council of Europe youth partnership, Contribution to EU Youth Wiki: non-programme countries, Chapter V - Armenia
Participation



III. Media: media freedom

Internet freedom in Armenia has improved since the Velvet Revolution swept Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan into power in 2018. Access continues to grow. Users generally do not encounter restrictions in online content, nor do they usually face legal or extra-legal punishment for their online activities. However, in the early days of the government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, officials moved to censor online news outlets and individual social media users. In addition, the government began to collect metadata from users' mobile devices for contact tracing purposes, raising alarm among privacy advocates¹⁴.

2020 was the toughest and most difficult period for the Armenian media and journalists compared to all previous years of CPFE (The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression) monitoring. This was due, first of all, to the large-scale war in Nagorno-Karabakh, unleashed by Azerbaijan and the difficulties of its coverage, and also the unfounded restrictions on freedom of speech in the fight against the coronavirus ever since the beginning of the year¹⁵.

Both during the state of emergency due to the pandemic and during the martial law declared since the beginning of the war, an RA Governmental decree banned the publication of any but official information in the media outlets and on the social media, too. Moreover, the fact that the implementation of these decrees was controlled by law enforcement agencies, interfering in the activities of the media, often with subjective and arbitrary approaches, caused a lot of concern¹⁶.

14. Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2020, Armenia: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/armenia/freedom-net/2020>

15. The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Annual report of CPFE on Situation with Freedom of Expression and Violations of Rights of Journalists and Media in Armenia, 2020

16. The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Annual report of CPFE on Situation with Freedom of Expression and Violations of Rights of Journalists and Media in Armenia, 2020

On March 16, the Government of the Republic of Armenia passed a decree, restricting freedom of expression, along with a number of other rights. The aim was to ensure no panic was caused among the public with publications about the coronavirus. This resonated very negatively among the media and journalistic organisations. International organisations also expressed their concern in that regard.

In 2020 during the state of emergency in Armenia due to COVID-19, any “organisation that carries out journalistic activities” (the term includes electronic publications that are not considered part of the legacy media) would only be allowed to publish information about the coronavirus crisis that had been released by official sources. The government explained that this was necessary to avoid any aggression towards coronavirus patients or panic among the population. Journalists and editors criticised this decision, stating that there was no precise definition of which messages may or may not cause panic. Also, during the COVID-19 pandemic, several online flash mobs pushed people to maintain social distance, wear masks, and take other precautions. Prime Minister Pashinyan, a frequent Facebook user, asked his supporters to film people without masks and put the videos on social media which various observers criticised as violating ethics and privacy rights¹⁷.

In 2020, Armenia ranked 61st out of 180 countries in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Without Borders. Armenia ranked 61st in 2019, 80th in 2018, 79th in 2017, and 74th in 2016.

According to the reports published in 2020, Armenia has maintained its position in the international ranking of press freedom, but the situation in the country is not favourable, given the violations of the rights of journalists and media. The number of different kinds of pressure during the reporting year totalled 273. 6 cases of physical violence and 90 violations of the right to receive and disseminate information were registered. The number

17. OSCE, Coronavirus response should not impede the work of the media in Armenia, says OSCE Media Freedom Representative, 24 March 2020: <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/449098>

of new court cases involving media outlets and journalists totalled 74□ The vast majority, namely 61 of them, are on the grounds of insult and defamation under Article 1087.1 of the Civil Code, 13 are labour and other kinds of disputes.



VI. Economic conditions: youth working conditions, inequality among youth individuals/groups, poverty and social mobility

Numerous studies confirm that unemployment is one of the primary problems among young people. There is a major gap between the education and demands of the labour market. Unemployment and employment rates among young people have not changed dramatically in recent years. The highest unemployment rate is reported among youth aged 20-24 years-old, standing at 35.7% in 2016¹⁸.

According to official statistics, average youth employment rate is around 32% and unemployment rate is 28%. At the same time, these indicators, with very small fluctuations of 1-2%, have remained almost unchanged during the last 10 years. There is a mismatch between the education system supply and the labour market demand, which is mainly due to the following: young people choosing popular but not demanded professions; lack of secondary vocational education qualifications; low level of applied knowledge at that level of education; non-compliance of educational programs with market requirements; etc.

According to a labour force survey conducted in 2018 by the State Statistics Committee, the labour force in Armenia makes up 68% of the population,

18. The Demographic Yearbook of RA, NSS RA, 2017, p. 73

of which 57% are economically active. Among the economically active population 20.4% are unemployed. 45% of the unemployed are 15-35 years old. According to these indicators, Armenia has the lowest position in the region. The highest economic activity is observed among male population.

The problems faced by young people can also be seen in the context of wider socio-economic difficulties in Armenia, with high levels of unemployment, poverty and migration for work being an evident pattern across all age groups. Young people are competing for the few available opportunities with the older generation, which is considerably more experienced. It is within this context that young people are trying to find their place in the society and transition to adulthood. When this transition is characterised by the move from education to employment, and the move away from being children in their parents' home and starting their own family, the lack of opportunities for young people makes the transition very difficult. The absence of a holistic State Youth Policy, which would address the existing challenges and create opportunities and environment for the development and advancement of the young people, eventually, prevents this group of citizens from any meaningful participation and impact on the governance and decision-making in the country¹⁹. According to "Youth-focused and gender-sensitive labour market research in Armenia", both young men and women with a postgraduate education are unlikely to stay unemployed. Female youth unemployment rates slightly exceeded male rates in a group with a vocational education (16.5% of female as opposed to 14.3% of male). Furthermore, it is striking to note the extremely high rates of unemployment for young people with a secondary general education (21.3%). Around one-quarter of young men and around 19% of young women with a secondary education are without work and seeking work²⁰.

The discrepancies between the education system and the actual demand of the labour market still remains one of the most relevant issues in youth employability. Theoretical knowledge in universities does not cover the practical needs of the employers, thus failing to prepare young people

19. Armenian Progressive Youth, Everybody Counts! A Handbook on Inclusion and Participation of young people in Eastern Partnership Countries, p. 14

20. Save the Children, Youth-focused and gender-sensitive labour market research in Armenia, 2018

for real jobs. The existing cooperation between employers and local universities is not institutional and is centralised around student university apprenticeship programs.

Lack of working or volunteering experience leaves young people with the inability to gain practical knowledge and skills necessary for the real jobs out of universities. Although universities provide professional knowledge, they fail to acknowledge the importance of practice and internships to integrate into the education curriculum. Moreover, the materials and information provided by the university syllabus quite often appear inapplicable in real job positions. Thus, for instance, a number of books, techniques, or professional content provided by universities have appeared outdated and not applicable.

Post-COVID and post-war reality in Armenia have created new challenges in terms of youth employability. Firstly, due to COVID, the number of available jobs has immensely decreased. Secondly, the necessity to work online brought the necessity of new skills and digital competencies to the fore. New competencies and new ethics are emerging due to work transformations, and this created vagueness around how to apply for jobs and what new skills employees require. Moreover, as a result of the war, there are a number of young people who acquired disabilities, mental health problems, etc.

In 2017, the Armenian Progressive Youth NGO initiated research assessing youth political participation and inclusion in community life. The main problem, which the respondents see in their communities, is the absence of jobs. For those who are from bordering villages, the other biggest issue is the geographic location and distance from big cities. Another problem raised by the respondents is migration and consequences of migration on young people, also lack of youth projects and youth activities in the regions. The majority of respondents from rural areas stated that such kind of problems are not unique for their community, but also very prevalent in other communities as well. The answers given by young people from distant villages illustrate differences with young people from big cities, with the youth in rural areas not being involved in public and cultural life as well as those in cities. Additionally, there are fewer education and employment

opportunities for youth in rural areas²¹.

When it comes to gender-sensitive issues of youth employability, there is even less comprehensiveness around the topic of how to integrate young women in the job market. Although the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women in Armenia laid the foundations for gender policies and new legislation, it still fails to grasp the discrimination and eliminate social and cultural prejudicial attitudes towards women. Women's labour force participation is lower than that of men, with just over half (51.4%) of women of working age participating in the labour force, compared with 70.6% of men. Women are more likely to work in part-time positions than men (34% vs. 18%). Unemployment is high among young women (aged 15–24) at 45%, compared with 33.3% of men in the same age group. Thus, young women suffer more in the job market due to discriminatory practices by employees and the social norms attributed to the role of women in the society in Armenia. There are several issues that women encounter on their way to career development.

Firstly, gender stereotypes about the roles of men and women immensely influence the young career choices of young people. While women are more likely to enrol as university students at bachelor and postgraduate levels, the data on completion rates show that women may face specific challenges in completing their studies. While women are the majority of those enrolled in postgraduate degrees, their completion rate is lower once enrolled, whereas for men it is higher. Women are more than two-thirds of students enrolling at the doctoral level but only one-quarter of those who complete their degree.

Another crucial reason for preferring to hire young men over young women is the reproductive rights that employees need to consider. Young women are less preferred to be considered for the vacancies because of the maternity leave that gives women the opportunity to reserve their job position for up to 3 years. That is why young women are expected to take up any job available, without much consideration, because of the inequality of competition with men.

21. Armenian Progressive Youth, Everybody Counts! A Handbook on Inclusion and Participation of young people in Eastern Partnership Countries, p. 20

To summarise, there is a wide range of factors affecting youth unemployment in Armenia. The overall economic situation of the country negatively affects the number of workplaces available. In a search for a job that matches their level of education and expertise, many youngsters leave the country, which results in a brain drain. In rural areas, where there are no opportunities at all, young men frequently leave for seasonal jobs, usually in Russia²². Perversely, this does not result in greater opportunities for the young women. Patriarchal attitudes prevail and the only option available to women is to marry and, if possible, work locally.

Thus, social norms and patriarchal attitudes combined with economic factors limit options for young men, and even more for young women. In cities, these issues are also seen but in a different way. As explained above, when education can be afforded, it tends to be boys who benefit rather than girls.

As a result of male migration, women head one third of households in Armenia. This trend is rising and is especially noticeable in rural settlements²³.



V. Social-cultural conditions: general living conditions, education, religions, ethnic groups, minorities and gender aspects

In recent years, there is a tendency of personal-social development, active social participation and social inclusion of young people in Armenia, which is often not implemented due to the lack or absence of opportunities

22. Caucasus Institute, Yerevan, Migration of population of Armenia: Economic factors, 2015

23. European Training Foundation, Youth Transition to Work in Armenia, 2019

for full social inclusion. The passive participation of young people in the cultural sphere is often conditioned by the lack or complete absence of youth programmes in the relevant structures, such as cultural centres, houses of culture, and other similar structures. Cultural centres operating since the Soviet era are mostly in a deplorable state, and there are almost no new centres. The poor condition of cultural centres or their absence is especially significant in rural communities.

The concept of human development emphasises the importance of science in parallel with education, the development of mechanisms for the involvement of young people in innovative and creative fields. Lack of awareness and motivation to take care of the health of young people, to visit medical institutions on time, to be informed about diseases, to take preventive measures, to undergo a medical examination is an issue on the agenda. There is a lack of Armenian-language information materials aimed at raising awareness of young people on psychological health.

There is still no history of youth work, state institutionalised work with young people in the field of youth support in the Republic of Armenia. As a separate subject the "Youth Worker" was defined for the first time in the Republic of Armenia in the Concept of the State Youth Policy approved in 2014. Next, a number of general and narrow thematic researches have been carried out, which try to present the current state of the institute of youth work or its separate components and development perspectives.

The order of the RA Minister of Education and Science on the approval of the "Regulations of the Institute of Young Workers" and the "Training Program for Young Workers" approved by the Government of the Republic of Armenia in December 2015 became a solid basis for institutionalisation of the sphere. Based on the latter, annual video-practical training courses for youth workers were conducted in 2016, 2017 and 2019, with the involvement of independent expert trainers by the Ministry.

In working with young people in the Republic of Armenia, free expression of opinions, asking questions, and a critical approach are encouraged, which directly contribute to the free participation of young people in various fields, as well as to the expression of ideas and new initiatives. Both

formal and non-formal educational programmes, such as the organisation of international festivals, conferences, competitions, conferences, seminars, courses, and other public events, are the guarantee of the above-mentioned results in the education system. In the context of education reform, non-formal education programs are gaining additional importance, as they can close the gaps in the education system, equip young people with the necessary skills to position themselves in the labour market, support their multifaceted development and involvement in various fields.

The role of the youth sector is especially important in attracting young people with limited opportunities. The most effective way in reaching and involving unorganised youth are youth organisations working at the local level and youth workers.

CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH FINDINGS





I. General characteristics of youth in Armenia

Participants of FGDs found it difficult to distinguish characteristics of young people living in Yerevan and mostly mention similarities Armenian youth have. According to participants, young people living in Armenia were characterised by being less open-minded and having more psychological complexes compared to European youth. However, most of the participants mentioned that they notice the same characteristics among young people living in CIS and EaP countries. The Armenian youth were described as conservative according to few participants. Despite this, during the last few years a positive trend is noticed, particularly among young people aged 14 - 20, in terms of engagement, active participation, freely expressing themselves, etc.

"I would like to talk more about psychological complexes. There is a bit much in Armenia. For example, when you watch interviews conducted in Europe, young people speak calmly and freely, and the Armenians... ashamed, hang their heads. It can be due to criticism, in Armenia that criticism is high both in the society and in the family".

Male, 20 y.o.

Meanwhile, Armenian youth were described as very purposeful, particularly in the regions due to lack of opportunities, more difficult life conditions in regions, etc, which makes the young people work harder towards their goals.

"Young people in Yerevan are more lazy than young people in the regions, they are more purposeful than "

Female, 19 y.o.

In addition, participants mentioned that youngsters in Armenia are more knowledgeable about geopolitics, international and domestic politics compared to European youth. However, at the same time, on average, Armenian youngsters have a lack of life skills and emotional intelligence.

"We cannot express our emotions, we are very close-minded, both on society and individual level."

Female, 26 y.o.

A small number of participants described youngsters as "people living with the ideas of the past, cut off from reality". According to the participants, it is not universal, but is clearly observed among different groups of the society. Interestingly, FGD participants mentioned relocation of people with different cultural backgrounds (Syrian Armenians, Russians) to Armenia affected the youth in a positive way. Also, the opening of the "TUMO Center" in Yerevan, increasing the number of non-formal education opportunities at local and international levels had a great and long-term impact on youth.



II. Leisure activities of youngsters in Yerevan

Among all participants of FGDs, hanging out with friends was the most common option to spend their free time. However, it was noted that there were not many places to go with friends in Yerevan and mostly young people spend their time at cafes, bars and pubs.

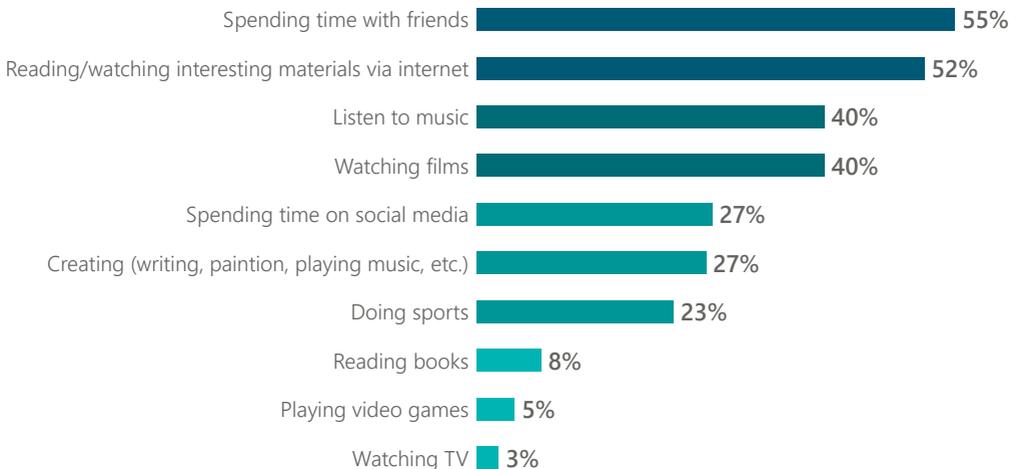
The older cohort of participants (aged 25 - 30) who are employed at various non-state organizations go to the gym during their free time. The reason is affordable gym packages provided by employers. This pattern is not noticed among students or unemployed youngsters, who mentioned they have few opportunities to do sports and would like to have affordable opportunities, e.g. sport clubs at university, open-air quality sports areas, etc. Several participants mentioned that they are involved in various art-

related hobby groups. The least common way to spend free time among young people is attending the theatres.

Participating in non-formal education opportunities was not perceived as a way to spend free time, according to FGDs. Among participants aged 25+ the participation level is quite low due to little free time; the main reason to participate in educational and other youth-related activities is to change career path or to add sources of income.

Ways of spending free time are remarkably similar if comparing the results from the Facebook poll. More than half of respondents prefer spending time with friends (55%), followed by reading/watching interesting materials via the Internet (52%) and listening to music and watching films (40%). Only 23% of poll participants mentioned doing sports as a way of spending free time (Figure 1).

Figure 1. How do you like to spend your free time? (multiple-choice question)



Among the hobbies young people mention are reading, watching movies, dancing, hiking, playing music and singing, listening to music, photography, etc. (Figure 2.).

Figure 2. Hobbies of young people in Yerevan



In terms of opportunities to organize their leisure time, most of the participants in the discussion compared their opportunities with opportunities of youngsters living in the regions. Unlike the residents of the regions, the young people living in Yerevan have wide opportunities according to the participants. In particular, there are various free opportunities provided by the state for youngsters under 18: art, painting, ceramics classes, music school. For young people aged 18+, there are also quite a lot of opportunities in Yerevan. However, according to participants, young people need to have a sufficient salary to take advantage of them. In this term, entertainment youth events, concerts, festivals, and hobby groups are the most demanded activities according to a Facebook poll.

"In Yerevan, for youngsters with average salary, only dance and music amateur groups are accessible. For the rest of the sports activities you need to have a higher income."

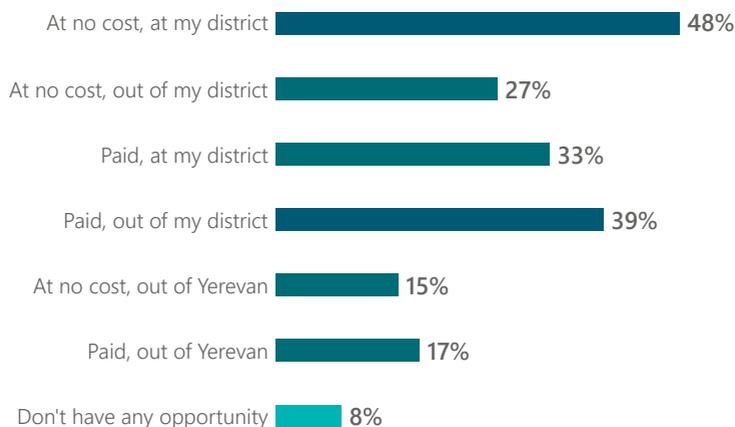
Female, 29 y.o.

"Number of cultural events, festivals are increasing in Yerevan, however the prices are quite high, as a student I can't afford to attend them".

Male, 23 y.o.

According to the online survey results, half of the respondents have the possibility to participate in their interests/hobbies in their district at no cost (48%). Only 8% of respondents mentioned they don't have any opportunity to participate in their hobbies/interests (Figure 3.).

Figure 3. What possibilities do you have to participate in your interests/hobbies? With cost or without cost / at your district/outside of your district? (multiple-choice question)



Interestingly, youth who grew up in regions are most likely to mention that in Yerevan there are a lot of opportunities to organise their free time, compared to young people who grew up in Yerevan. Regardless of the availability of leisure opportunities, some of the participants raise the issue of their quality and awareness level among young people.

"There are a lot of opportunities, the problem is about quality and level of implementation. For example, we have cultural events, festival but the problem is the quality and scale of the events."

Female, 19 y.o.

“Universities provide opportunities to engage in sport clubs at university, however I am a 5th year student and know only one person who uses this opportunity.”

Male, 21 y.o.

According to the data obtained during KIs, the problem of organising youth free time in Yerevan is bigger than expected. Experts noted that in the last few years work with young people has been carried out more in the regions. Youth centres are being opened in the regions, but there are clearly no such centres in Yerevan. Regardless of the fact that the opportunities for organising leisure time in Yerevan are expanded, there is room to work towards fun and meaningful leisure time organisation. Moreover, it should be targeted, and accessible to all young people, as there is clearly a group of youngsters who are excluded from all those activities. In order to achieve this, almost all key informants mentioned the need of opening youth centres in Yerevan operating for young people from 14 to 25, particularly in the administrative districts far from the city centre, e.g. Nor Nork, Nubarashen, Malatia-Sebastia. Participants of FGDs also mentioned the need for spaces where youth can gather, discuss different ideas and do networking.

During FGDs, young people mentioned the need for following activities/centres in terms of organisations of their free time:

- Centres/spaces, where young people can gather, get to know each other, share ideas, etc.,
- Scientific centres for youth, where young people can get acquainted with diverse spheres, collaborate on the projects, gain knowledge on how to conduct research, receive mentorship from scientists, work on industry projects,
- Hobby groups, e.g. reading club, dancing group, sports group, etc.,
- Open-air spaces for diverse sports activities,
- Co-working spaces for young people,
- Unified centres for art, amateur sport centres, concept stores,
- Digital platform, where all events/opportunities/places in Yerevan will be gathered and young people can be informed about different opportunities,

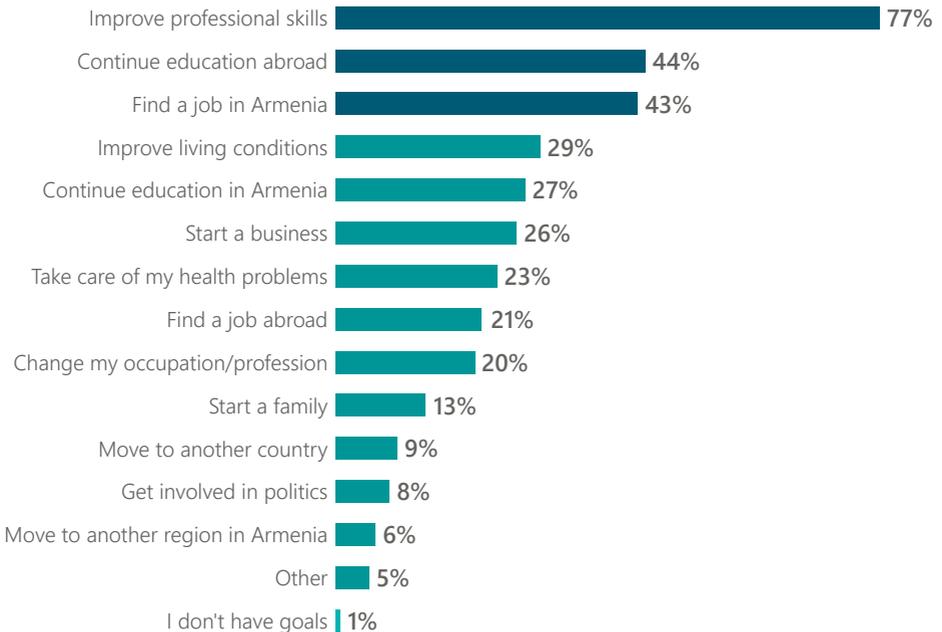
- Exhibitions, festivals, concerts,
- Youth entertainment events.



III. Aspirations, challenges and needs of young people in Yerevan

While speaking about the opportunities for spending leisure time by young people, it is necessary to emphasise the goals, challenges and needs of young people. According to the online survey results, the vast majority of respondents (77%) mentioned improvement of professional skills as a short-term goal. Additionally, more women (80%) have in their goals to improve their professional skills compared to men respondents (65%). Almost half of respondents (44%) plan to continue their education abroad and 43% have an aspiration to find a job in Armenia (Figure 4).

Figure 4. What are your short-term goals?



These results are also confirmed by data gathered through FGDs and KIs. The youngest respondent groups criticised the current curricula and delivery of education as being too theoretical, with the inability to gain practical knowledge and skills necessary for the real jobs out of universities. Due to this, they have to find alternative ways to acquire practical skills required by employers. Participants from the older groups (aged 24 - 30) mentioned their plan to learn a new profession and to shift career paths for several reasons. Some of the reasons are: i) unable to find a job by their profession, ii) finding out they have chosen an unsuitable profession, or iii) there are no university programmes for modern professions, so alternative education opportunities should be identified. During all FGDs, the lack of understanding of career trajectories and skills in career management were mentioned.

"Among my friends there is a disappointment in education, a feeling of insecurity in our future professional activities."

Female, 21 y.o.

"Education does not assure future employment for young people."

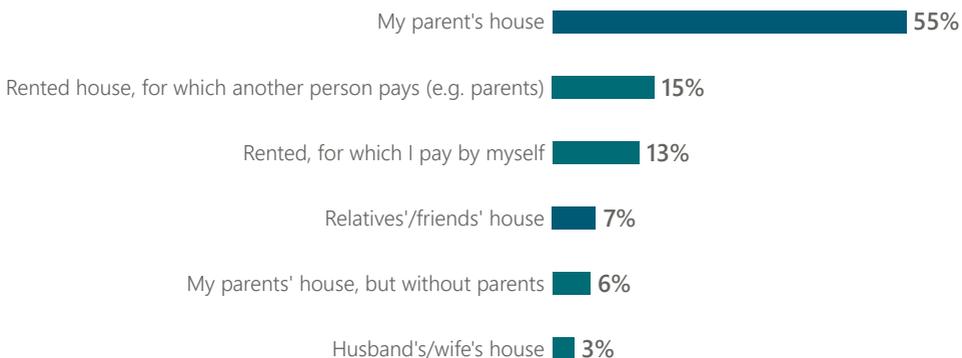
Key informant N8, Female

The aspirations for studying abroad, according to young people, have several reasons. On the one hand, the gap between the education and the labour market in Armenia was mentioned, on the other hand youth are worried about their future, in particular, due to the post-war and current political situation in Armenia. According to the majority of focus group participants, uncertainty and fear for the future among young people in Armenia increased. Young people also noticed concerns about physical security and safety among their peers.

As a result of the lack of professional orientation services, education system supply and the labour market demand, and the general economic situation of Armenia, employment and financial security remains one of the most challenging issues for young people. As mentioned in the online survey, 43% of participants receive financial support from parents.

Almost all participants of focus group discussions mentioned a great deal of influence parents have over different aspects of young people's life, particularly programmes of study that youth pursue, participation in educational opportunities abroad, living separately from parents, etc. The latest is also reaffirmed by online survey results. 55% of respondents mentioned they live at their parents' house (Figure 5.). In this regard, during KIIIs the issue of affordable housing opportunities was mentioned as a challenge for youngsters to live separately and to start a family.

Figure 5. Where do you live?



Although there is an increase in participation in non-formal education activities, the awareness about the opportunities among youngsters is quite low, stated both by FGD participants and a few key informants.

"In the beginning, when I started to participate in various youth programmes, it seemed to me that all young people are aware, they participate, then after several times you see the same people. Then, when sharing with friends, you realise that they are not aware of those opportunities, you understand that it is a closed circle."

Female, 25 y.o.

Meanwhile, almost all key informants mentioned the decrease of motivation in participating in non-formal education opportunities among young people living in Yerevan. One reason for this may be the increasing number of opportunities and difficulty filtering suitable ones. Another reason is that the programmes are quite general and young people do not clearly understand the possible benefits and impact on their lives. In this sense, lack of grass-root youth work was mentioned by key informants.

"It is very difficult to create interest in non-formal educational programmes among young people, because they did not participate in such programmes and could not understand what great impact they can bring. The possible impact should be clearly explained to young people."

Female, 27 y.o.

Among all participants of the study the problem of volunteering work recognition was mentioned. Development of regulation pertaining to volunteering activities in Armenia could also positively impact youth participation in opportunities provided by NGOs in Yerevan and trust towards those organizations.

"We do not have basics, youth structures that will work with the simplest youth in the "streets"."

Expert N9, Male

Even though the transportation issue isn't youth specific, all FGD participants mentioned it as an important one in terms of organising their leisure time and participation in diverse opportunities. According to the participants, transportation problems in Yerevan, particularly almost no transport in the evening hours, quite often restrains them from participating in the entertainment events and educational opportunities. The same issue applies for young people who live in neighbourhood areas.

To achieve aforementioned goals and solve challenges, the following needs were mentioned by FGD participants:

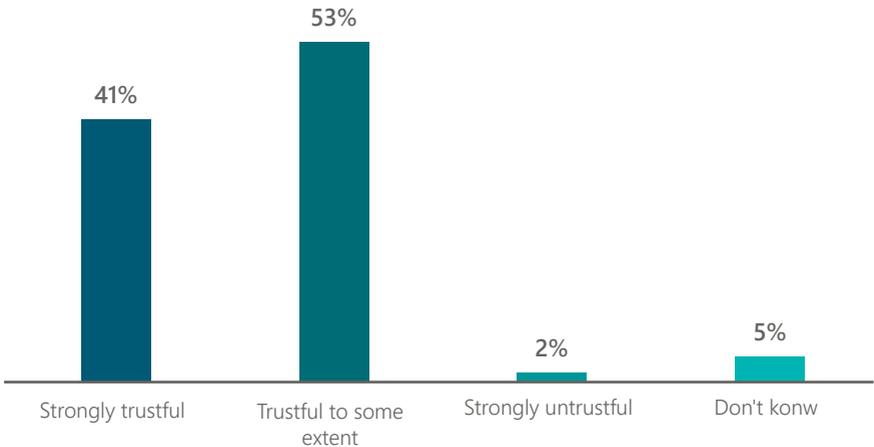
- Develop career orientation programmes for high school students, create mentorship programmes during diverse phases of career path,
- Establish centres that will help young people who want to change their profession experience a new profession. As a solution it was suggested to adjust the curricula of TUMO centre to people aged 18+, who want to specialise in creative industries,
- Establish centres, which will help during all process from job search to first employment, will have career counselling services and will provide programmes aimed to develop soft skills,
- Creation of more job opportunities for students (special working conditions for students),
- Development of infrastructure for students from regions, particularly there is a need of dormitories or organisations/university units which will assist students in finding apartments / rooms for rent on convenient terms,
- Spaces for young people of different ages (14 - 17 and 18 - 24) where they can gather, students can work on collaborative projects, high school students can learn new things, etc. In this sense, according to participants, it is very important to review the working hours of university libraries, as they could serve as space for students.

Besides the goals and challenges young people currently experience, both FGD and online survey participants were asked about new skills/knowledge they want to acquire. During the focus group the participants emphasized the need to gain/develop:

- soft skills, especially among young people aged 14-20,
- knowledge on labour rights,
- emotional intelligence, knowledge on how to create and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships, foster personal growth,
- applied time management skills,
- financial literacy, skills on personal financial resources planning,
- digital security skills,
- skills on how to act in emergency situations generally and in Yerevan (war, earthquake, etc.).

everyday life, etc. Overwhelming majority of youngsters who participated in the online survey (94%) described their relationship with adults as trustful (Figure 7.).

Figure 7. To what extent does your relationship with adults (parents, youth leaders, teachers, etc.) is trustful?



Sixty one percent of respondents have a mentor or role model in their lives. Mother, friend, teacher/university professor were among the top answers provided by young people on who that person is (Figure 8., Figure 9.).

Figure 8. Do you have a mentor or role model?

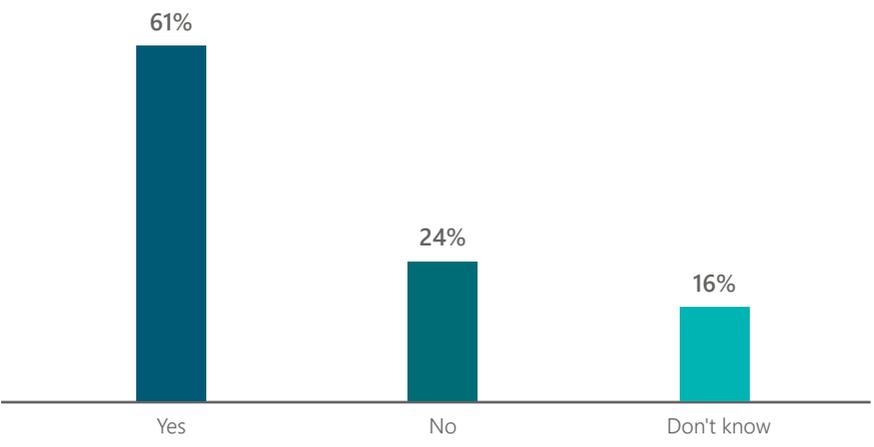
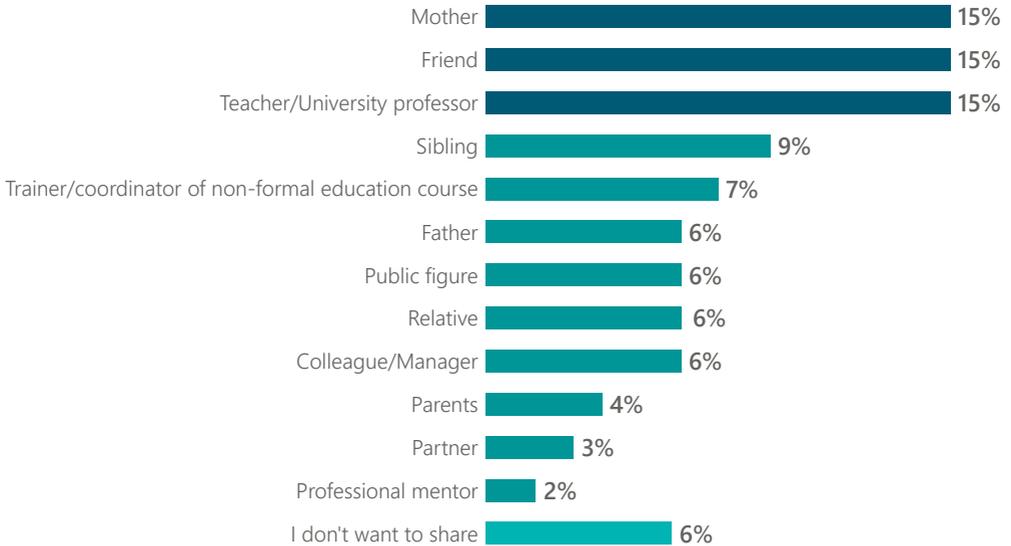


Figure 9. If yes, who?



The overall communication skills level among survey participants was quite high according to their perceptions. Thirty-nine percent of respondents assessed their communication skills on a four out of six-point scale, followed by 30% mentioned the highest point (six). However, when participants asked what type of skills they need to develop, interpersonal communication skills were the second top mentioned response. The participants in the qualitative study also discussed the need to improve interpersonal communication and emotion management skills.



V. Civic engagement of young people in Yerevan

Armenian youth have been increasingly active in civic and political life in recent years. Interestingly, all FGD participants who were involved in any local or international youth project strongly believe that they can have an impact on the society. Young people noted their engagement can particularly bring positive change for i) breaking stereotypes in society, ii) bringing innovation to various fields, iii) sharing knowledge and experience with younger generation (aged 12 - 17) and so on. The same pattern is also noted among online survey participants, particularly 86% of respondents feel that they can be a good influence in their community and 60% of respondents agree that they are a resource to their community. Moreover, the majority of young people consider youth involvement in decision-making as important. Meanwhile, youngsters who are not interested in civic engagement and do not have an experience of participation in youth projects do not share the same beliefs.

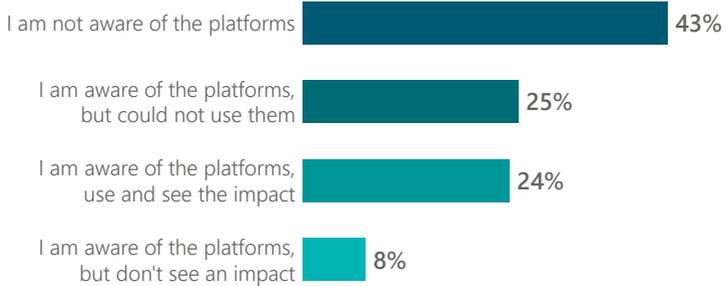
“Young people in Armenia have a great responsibility, the same young people risk their lives serving in the army, the same young people face labour market difficulties, face the problems of society, the same young people must have the flexibility to overcome these problems or not emigrate. However, young people do not know how to protect their rights, they are not properly informed about the decisions and how to be involved in various decision-making processes”

Female 26 y.o.

Pertaining the question on knowledge of platforms to influence as a young person, only 24% of online survey respondents mentioned that they are aware, use and see the impact of those platforms. Almost half of the respondents (43%) are not aware of any platforms through which they can

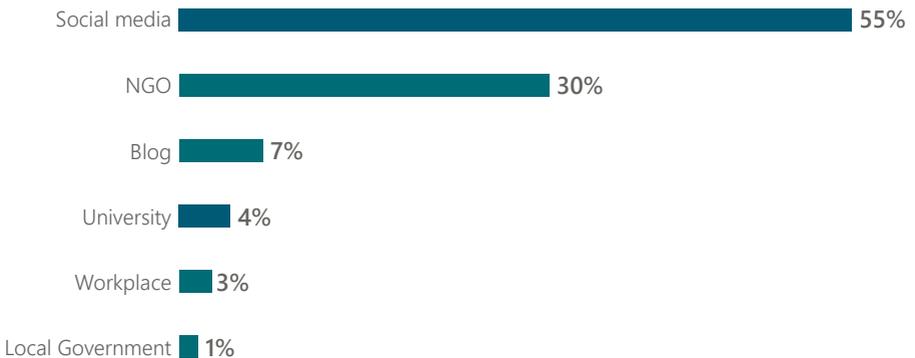
have an influence as a young person (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Do you know any platforms to influence as a young person?



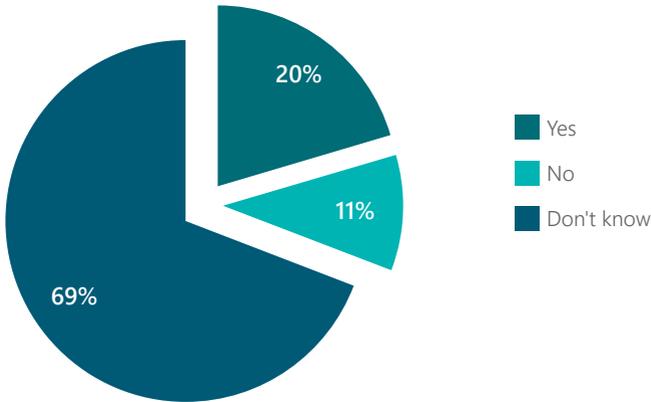
The overwhelming majority of respondents perceived social media (55%) as the main platform where they can have influence as youngsters, followed by NGOs (30%) (Figure 11.). The qualitative study similarly identified NGOs and social media as the main platforms. It should be noted that NGOs are considered as a platform only among those FGD participants who either volunteered at NGOs or participated in a youth project.

Figure 11. If yes, could you mention the platforms?



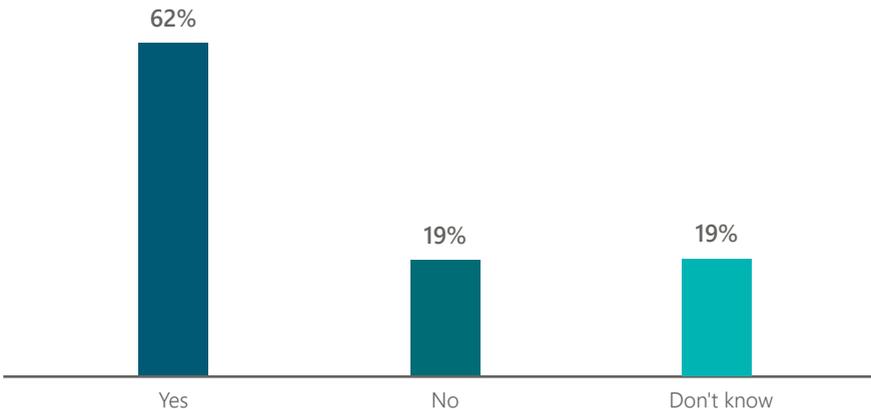
Despite the increase in civic engagement among young people during the last few years, 69% of respondents do not know any platforms they would like to participate in to have an impact as youngsters. Only 20% of online survey participants mentioned the existence of a platform they want to become part of.

Figure 12. Do you see platforms you would like to participate in?



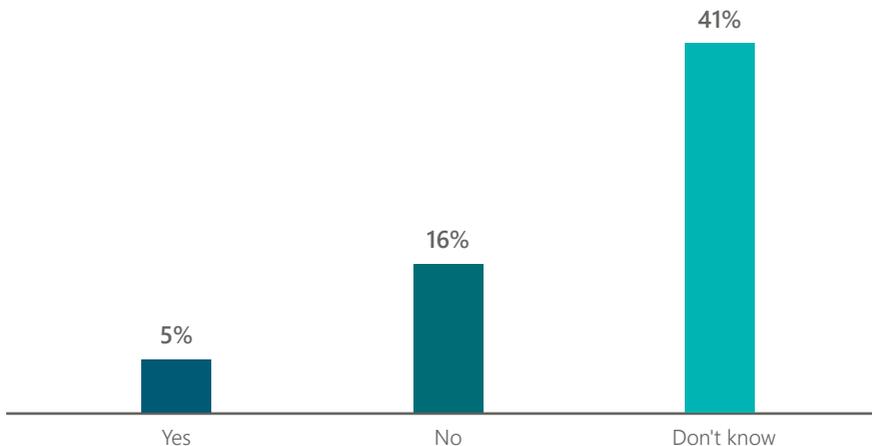
On the question of how young people can contribute to their community, 62% of online survey respondents mentioned they have ideas on how to influence the development and improvement of their community (Figure 13.).

Figure 13. Do I have new ideas about how my community can be improved?



Although over half of respondents have ideas how their communities can be improved, only 5% of respondents think they have an opportunity to work towards their ideas. In the meantime, 41% do not clearly know about possible opportunities (Figure 14.). Those who have an opportunity to act on their ideas, mentioned local NGOs as the main supporting platform. The most common suggestion by youth was creating spaces for young people to activate youth life in their community, followed by organising various projects aimed to clean surrounding areas. One of the ideas was creating an application which will manage queues at polyclinics in Yerevan.

Figure 14. Do I have an opportunity to act on that idea?



Even though, among young people NGOs are recognised as key platforms for implementing their ideas, trust towards NGOs is quite low according to the key informants. The reason is the increasing number of organisations and opportunities at the national level, and the lack of targeted youth work.

"There is often an opinion that NGOs are insincere in their aspirations. From the very beginning, young people have an aversion. Young people do not trust the work of NGOs so much; we need to work on increasing trust, apply an individual approach and create stable relationships."

Key informant N10, Female

According to survey results, the most frequent reasons for not implementing their ideas were the lack of financial resources and lack of motivation. This was reflected in discussions during the qualitative study in which some of the participants noted a decrease in motivation among their peers, which, in their opinion, was due to a lack of trust towards state bodies and low level of responsiveness of state bodies. Also lack of awareness about the forms of participation in the decision-making process was mentioned by young people.

In this sense, the key informants pointed out the importance of the youth centres' existence as a key platform for youth engagement in decision-making processes. In addition, continuous work with special focus on youngsters aged 14+ was mentioned.

"It is necessary to have a youth centre, where the young person will always know that he/she can go and share ideas freely."

Expert N3, Female



VI. Policies impacting youth

As revealed from KIs, the main obstacle in terms of youth policy making and implementation is the absence of law on youth or youth strategy in Armenia. The lack of a coherent policy and division of responsibilities across state agencies resulted in fractured youth work.

"This is a "coma" of youth policy in Armenia, this is clinical death"

Key informant N6, Female

"Youth are not a priority for politicians..."

Key informant N5, Female

The approval of the policy will ease communication between stakeholders. The absence of the policy may lead to a number of issues and, as the most important, lack of data on the opportunities and needs of young people at the state level was mentioned. The latter is carried out mostly by non-governmental organisations. However, for impactful youth work and policy implementation the recurrent research should be carried out. According to the key informants, absence of data results in fragmented project implementation by different stakeholders without a unified goal in terms of youth and their development.

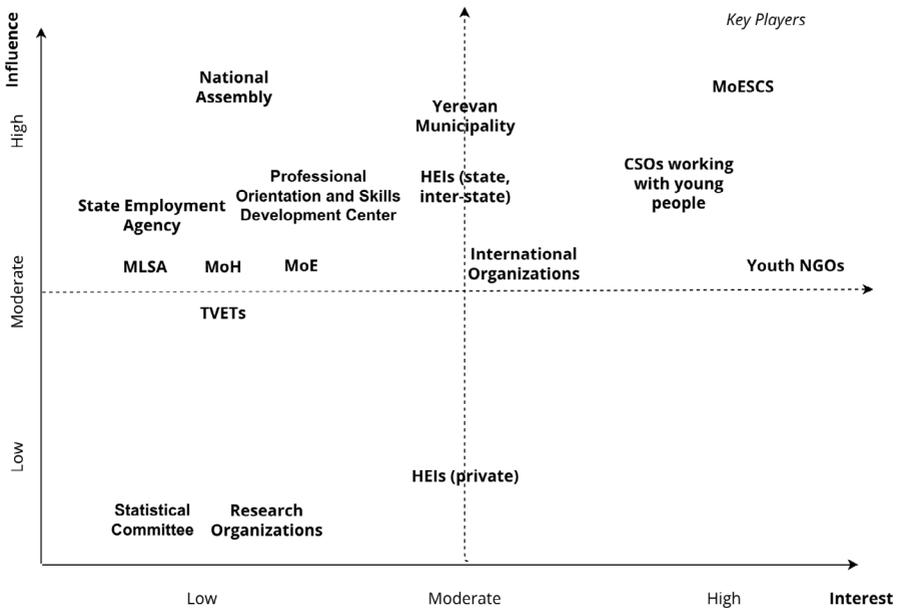
Considering that almost half of young people are living in Yerevan, the key informants suggested developing the Yerevan Youth Strategy that will facilitate the work with young people, concentrate on the needs of youngsters living in Yerevan and, as a result, have more targeted set of activities compared to the national one. In addition, establishment of youth club centres in all administrative units was recommended as a way for meaningful youth participation and engagement of diverse groups in decision making processes.

CHAPTER 3. STAKEHOLDER MAPPING



Young people have an important role in a number of spheres: the engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders (such as Government, state agencies, local and regional municipalities, CSOs, research organisations, education institutions and private sector), are crucial for all-inclusive development of the sector. This chapter is the first attempt to collect information about all possible stakeholders in the youth field working with young people in Yerevan and categorise them based on the interest and influence in the field (on three levels: low, moderate, high). Data used for stakeholder mapping is collected via Internet search and KIIs. The main stakeholders are presented in Figure 15. (the detailed list is in Annex 1).

Figure 15. Stakeholders' Matrix



The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, particularly, the Department for Youth Policy, Supplementary and Continuing Education, has a crucial role in youth policy development and its implementation. However, the committee has a wide range of responsibilities and a lack of human and financial resources. Except for policy development, programmes supported by the ministry are mainly implemented through providing

grants to youth NGOs to conduct trainings, workshops, campaigns, etc. It should be noted that interest level and cooperation between the ministry and other organisations, particularly youth NGOs, increased during recent years. Analysis of KIIs data showed that regardless of current cooperation between the state and civil society, the existing cooperation between the public sector and CSOs is insufficient. In this term, a more structured and constructive approach for the cooperation of the public sector and CSO community is needed; this was mentioned by both parties. Moreover, cooperation among youth NGOs and CSOs working with young people is also crucial and their unification around the state will contribute to the optimised allocation of available resources and have a long-term impact. According to experts, the improvement of cooperation will also contribute to the increase of mutual trust.

Other state agencies which have an impact on diverse aspects of young people's life should also be engaged in youth policy-making and implementation. However, as mentioned by KIIs, a lack of communication among decision-makers exists within the context of the state youth policy and youth programme implementation.

CSOs in Armenia have a vital role in the youth sector. The CSO sector in Armenia includes public organisations, foundations, unions, as well as non-formal groups and movements. There is no complete and comprehensive database on Armenian CSOs where their activity areas, goals, missions and values, operating status and other information are compiled; a relatively extensive database is, however, available at CSO DePo website. Youth NGOs and CSOs working with young people are the main organisations working directly with young people through support of international organisations and the state. It is worth mentioning that youth NGOs in Yerevan do not receive institutional grants from donor communities. During the analysis of the youth NGOs and CSOs working with young people, it was challenging to identify those who operate only on the local level in Yerevan, as most of the organisations provide opportunities on the national level. In comparison, in regions of Armenia, there are quite a high number of youth NGOs operating on local level. This reaffirms the insights gathered during KIIs that organisations located and operating in Yerevan do not provide targeted programmes for young people living in

Yerevan. The youth NGOs and CSOs working with young people provide a diverse range of non-formal educational opportunities. According to KIIs, the programmes implemented for youth in Yerevan are mainly of a hybrid nature, aimed at fostering leadership and personal growth, increasing professional competitiveness and providing access to the labour market, developing entrepreneurship skills, etc. Youth are usually recruited for projects through announcements via social media channels and partner organisations, and rarely through study visits to educational institutions, community organisations or community leaders.

International donor organisations also play an active role in the youth sector mostly by providing CSOs with grants, or sometimes implementing programmes directly. The donor community includes the UN agencies such as UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, the EU Delegation to Armenia, USAID, U.S. Department of State, GIZ, the World Bank, SIDA, etc. Also, grants are provided by the different embassies operating in Armenia.

Educational institutions (high schools, TVETs, HEIs) have access to diverse groups of young people in Yerevan; however, there are no extracurricular activities provided by state high schools and TVETs. During recent years, different departments of the universities provided programmes which aimed to develop employability skills, and to foster entrepreneurship thinking. However, as revealed by FGDs, there is still a need for these kinds of programmes. Analysis of KI interviews and the websites of HEIs shows that there is a lack of cooperation among educational institutions and the CSO sector. TVETs and HEIs located in Yerevan are presented in Annex 1.; the list of high schools operating in Yerevan can be accessed via the official website of MoESCS (in Armenian).

Looking at the organisations providing data on the youth sector, it should be said that there are several kinds of organisations which provide information on youth. The Statistical Committee of RA provides data on youth. However, the youth specific data is not cumulated separately - it should be extracted from yearbooks, publications on different themes, etc., which requires some knowledge and skills. There are also think tanks, consultancy agencies, market research companies which carry out studies focused on young consumers' behaviour analysis, their preferences,

habits, and attitudes, employability trends, their perception on jobs, socio-economic trends, youth culture, education as well as on media, IT, finance and health. However, there is no annual research on youth; most of the research projects are based on the needs, interests and agenda of donor organisations and clients.

● CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of youth participation in government decision-making has been recognised by the state. However, the practical implementation of this principle is still not there. The absence of law on youth or youth strategy in Armenia is considered as the main obstacle, which has resulted in fractured youth work. Moreover, as revealed from key informant interviews, a lack of communication among decision-makers exists within the context of the state youth policy and youth programme implementation. The number of opportunities provided mostly by NGOs drastically increased during recent years. It is worth mentioning, however, that although the vast majority of organisations locate and operate in Yerevan, a huge part of the existing opportunities is organised on a national level and there is a lack of events on local level targeting young people living in Yerevan, which could be the reason for the decrease of motivation among youngsters. The programmes implemented for youth in Yerevan are mainly of a hybrid nature, aimed at boosting the potential, growth, professional competitiveness, and entrepreneurship among young people.

The needs assessment research has identified a range of unmet needs and gaps among young people living in Yerevan, particularly in programmes/ infrastructure that would enable them to contribute more meaningfully to the development of their community and their personal growth. Even though, compared to the regions, quite a lot of diverse opportunities exist in Yerevan, young people spend most of their free time socialising with friends, on the internet and social networks. However, there is a high demand for financially accessible sport and cultural forms of entertainment, as well as free youth spaces and outdoor sport areas. The highest level of demand by the young people living in Yerevan is for professional orientation, career counselling, programmes aimed to develop financial literacy, applied time management skills, interpersonal communication and soft skills.

As revealed by the research, the awareness level is a major problem. Young people are quite often unaware of various opportunities, especially those who have not personally participated in any events before and who do

not have socially active friends/relatives. Young people believe that they can have a good influence on their community and their engagement in decision-making is crucial. However, the level of awareness of the possible platforms through which they can have an influence as a young person is also quite low. Social media and NGOs are perceived as the main platforms through which they can have an influence as youngsters.

Transportation issues quite often restrain young people with fewer opportunities from participating in the entertainment events and educational opportunities which take place in evening hours.

Based on the desk study, and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, the following recommendations, under three headings- policy, infrastructure, and programmes were made:

Policy recommendations

- Introduce new and effective mechanisms for cross-sectoral and inter-ministerial cooperation within the context of the state youth policy,
- Develop Yerevan youth strategy, with particular focus on marginalised youth,
- Develop and make into effect a law on volunteering.
- Infrastructure related recommendations
- Establish youth centres in Yerevan, particularly in the administrative districts far from the city centre,
- Develop infrastructure for healthy lifestyle (outdoor sport areas, unified sports centre, etc.),
- Create digital education organisations and centres operating in Yerevan,
- Provide transportation in Yerevan during programmes, and for youth entertainment events implementation and for visitors of youth centres.
- Programme recommendations
- Develop professional orientation programmes which could be offered in cooperation with high schools and as a separate programme for interested youngsters,
- Create career guidance and counselling programmes, and mentorship programmes which could be offered in cooperation with universities

- and as a separate programme for interested youngsters,
- Organise awareness campaigns, particularly amongst youngsters aged 14 - 20, with direct visits to schools and VETs,
 - Implement more grassroots youth work programmes which operate on a continuous basis,
 - Conduct youth programmes which develop the young people's life skills, financial literacy, interpersonal communication skills, time management skills, etc.,
 - Organise amateur sport competitions and programmes promoting healthy lifestyle,
 - Organise accessible and affordable youth entertainment events (festivals, concerts, exhibitions, etc.).

ANNEX 1.

MATRIX OF STAKEHOLDERS

N	Name	Specific Unit, if applicable	Category	Power Level	Interest Level
1	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports	Department for Youth Policy, Supplementary and Continuing Education	Government	High	High
2	National Assembly	Standing committee on science, education, culture, diaspora, youth and sport	Government	High	Low
3	Yerevan Municipality	Division for youth and sport affairs	Local Self-Governing Body	High	Moderate
4	The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia (MLSA)	Public Council on Employment of Young People and Women	Government	Moderate	Low
5	Ministry of Economy	N/A	Government	Moderate	Low
6	Ministry of Health	N/A	Government	Moderate	Low
7	The State Employment Agency of Armenia (SEA)	N/A	State Organization	High	Low
8	Professional Orientation and Skills Development Centre	N/A	State Organization	High	Low
9	Statistical Committee of RA	N/A	State Organization	Low	Low
10	American University of Armenia	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
11	Fondation Université Française en Arménie	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
12	Russian - Armenian University	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
13	Yerevan State University	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
14	Armenian National Agrarian University	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
15	Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
16	Armenian State University of Economics	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate

17	Yerevan State Medical University	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
18	National Polytechnic University of Armenia	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
19	Armenian State Pedagogical University	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
20	National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
21	Eurasia International University	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
22	Yerevan Komitas State Conservatory	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
23	State Academy of Fine Arts of Armenia	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
24	European University	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
25	Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
26	Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Cinema	N/A	HEI	High	Moderate
27	Yerevan Northern University	N/A	HEI	Moderate	Moderate
28	Yerevan Haybusak University	N/A	HEI	Moderate	Moderate
29	Yerevan University after Movses Khorenatsi	N/A	HEI	Low	Moderate
30	Mkitar Gosh Armenian-Russian International University	N/A	HEI	Low	Moderate
31	Yerevan Gladzor University	N/A	HEI	Low	Moderate
32	GALIK University	N/A	HEI	Low	Moderate
33	Urartu University of Practical Psychology and Sociology	N/A	HEI	Low	Moderate
34	St. Theresa Medical University of Yerevan	N/A	HEI	Low	Moderate
35	Plekhanov Russian University of Economics	N/A	HEI	Low	Moderate
36	Yerevan State Regional College No.1	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
37	Yerevan State Regional College No.2	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
38	Yerevan State College of Informatics	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
39	Yerevan State Technological College	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
40	Yerevan State College of Light Industry	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low

41	Yerevan State Armenian-Greek College of Tourism, Service and Food Industry	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
42	Yerevan Financial and Economic College of Armenian State University of Economics	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
43	Yerevan State Humanitarian-Technical College	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
44	Yerevan State Humanitarian College	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
45	Yerevan State Musical College named after Romanos Melikyan	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
46	Yerevan State Musical-Pedagogical College named after Arno Babajanyan	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
47	Yerevan State College of Arts named after Panos Terlemezian	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
48	Yerevan State Agricultural College	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
49	Yerevan State Basic Medical College	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
50	Yerevan State Armenian-American Medical College "Erebouni"	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
51	Yerevan State College of Culture and Art	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
52	Yerevan State Choreographic College	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
53	Yerevan State Sports College of Olympic Reserve	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
54	European College of Armenia	N/A	VET	Moderate	Low
59	Armenian Progressive Youth NGO	N/A	Youth NGO	High	High
60	Youth Development Centre of Armenia	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
61	United Youth Union NGO	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
62	Youth for Change NGO	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
63	Federation of Youth Clubs of Armenia	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
64	Armenian Open Society NGO	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
65	Union of Creative Youth	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High

66	Youth for Development Foundation	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
67	Active Youth Citizens Initiative NGO	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
68	Future in Our Hands NGO	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
69	Armenian Youth League	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
70	ArmActive - Youth Centre - NGO	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
71	Youth Opportunities Club NGO	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
72	Youth Club for Intercultural Dialogue, Democracy and Peace	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
73	InMotion Armenia	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
74	DNA	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
76	AEGEE-Yerevan	N/A	Youth NGO	High	High
77	European Youth Parliament	N/A	Youth NGO	High	High
78	AIESEC	N/A	Youth NGO	Moderate	High
79	KASA Swiss Humanitarian Foundation	"Espaces" Youth Training Center in Yerevan	CSO working with young people	High	High
80	Armenian Caritas	N/A	CSO working with young people	High	High
81	Women Resource Centre	N/A	CSO working with young people	Moderate	Moderate
82	Society Without Violence	N/A	CSO working with young people	Moderate	Moderate
83	PINK Armenia	N/A	CSO working with young people	Moderate	Moderate
84	OxYGen Foundation for Protection of Youth and Women Rights	N/A	CSO working with young people	High	High
85	World Vision Armenia	N/A	CSO working with young people	High	High
86	Red Cross Armenian Society	N/A	CSO working with young people	Moderate	Moderate
87	Teach for Armenia	N/A	CSO working with young people	High	High

88	Eurasia Partnership Foundation	N/A	CSO working with young people	High	Moderate
90	Article 3 Club	N/A	CSO working with young people	Moderate	High
92	Birthright Armenia	N/A	CSO working with young people	High	Moderate
93	Armenia Volunteer Corps	N/A	CSO working with young people	High	Moderate
94	Today Art Initiative	N/A	CSO working with young people	Moderate	Moderate
95	Jinishian Memorial Foundation	N/A	CSO working with young people	High	High
96	Children of Armenia Fund (COAF)	N/A	CSO working with young people	High	High
97	People in Need	N/A	CSO working with young people	High	High
98	UN Armenia	UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP	International Organization/ Donor	High	High
99	USAID	N/A	International Organization/ Donor	High	High
100	World Bank	N/A	International Organization/ Donor	High	Low
101	EU Delegation to Armenia	N/A	International Organization/ Donor	High	High
102	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)	N/A	International Organization/ Donor	High	Moderate
103	The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	N/A	International Organization/ Donor	High	Moderate
104	Centre for Educational Research and Consulting	N/A	Research Organization	Low	Low
105	Caucasus Research Resource Center - Armenia	N/A	Research Organization	Low	Low

● ANNEX 2. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Gender	Male	20%
	Female	80%
Age	16 – 17	9%
	18 – 24	64%
	25 – 30	27%
District	Ajapnyak	7%
	Avan	9%
	Arabkir	12%
	Davtashen	7%
	Erebuni	7%
	Kentron	11%
	Malatia-Sebastia	11%
	Nor Nork	13%
	Nork Marash	1%
	Shengavit	14%
	Kanaker-Zeytun	5%
Don't know my district	3%	
Education	Middle school (grades 5 - 9)	1%
	High school (grades 10 -12)	10%
	Vocational education	7%
	Higher education (state university)	66%
	Higher education (international university, e.g. AUA)	10%
	Higher education (private university)	3%
Occupation	Postgraduate education	3%
	Employed pupil	2%
	Unemployed pupil	6%
	Employed (full-time)	28%
	Employed (part-time)	6%
	Self-employed	4%
	Employed student	18%
	Unemployed student	28%
	Unemployed (looking for a job)	9%
Unemployed	1%	

